

SHORTER NOTES

NOMENCLATURE.—The constant discussion now in progress concerning nomenclature may add to the interest of the following extract from Dr. George Sumner's leisurely treatment of the subject in his book entitled "A Compendium of Physiological and Systematic Botany" published at Hartford in 1820 :

"In all ages it has been customary to dedicate certain plants to the honor of distinguished persons. Thus *Euphorbia* commemorates the physician of Juba, a Moorish prince, and *Gentiana* immortalizes a king of Illyria. The scientific botanists of modern times have adopted the same mode of preserving the memory of benefactors to their science ; and though the honor may have been sometimes extended too far, that is no argument for its total abrogation. Some uncouth names thus unavoidably deform our botanical books ; but this is often effaced by the merit of their owners, and it is allowable to model them into grace as much as possible.

"Linnaeus has in several instances drawn a fanciful analogy between botanists and their appropriate plants, thus —

Bauhinia, after the two distinguished brothers, John and Caspar Bauhin, has a two-lobed or twin leaf.

Scheuchzeria, a grassy Alpine plant, commemorates the two Scheuchzers, one of whom excelled in the knowledge of Alpine productions, the other in that of Grasses.

Dorstenia, with its obsolete flowers, devoid of all beauty, alludes to the antiquated and uncouth book of Dorstenius.

Hernandia, an American plant, the most beautiful of all trees in its foliage, but furnished with trifling blossoms, bears the name of a botanist highly favored by fortune, and allowed an ample salary for the purpose of investigating the Natural History of the Western world, but whose labors have not answered the expense. On the contrary

Magnolia with its noble leaves and flowers, and

Dillenia, with its beautiful blossoms and fruit, serve to immortalize two of the most meritorious among botanists.

Linnaea, "a depressed, abject, Lapland (and American)

plant, long overlooked, flowering at an early age, was named by Gronovius after its prototype Linnaeus."

Specific names should be formed on similar principles to the generic ones; but some exceptions are allowed, not only without inconvenience, but with great advantage. Such as express the essential specific character are unexceptionable; but perhaps those which express something certain, but not comprehended in that character, are still more useful, as conveying additional information, for which reason it is often useful that vernacular names should not be mere translations of the Latin ones.

"Botanists occasionally adapt a specific name to some historical fact belonging to the plant or to the person whose name it bears, as *Linnæa borealis* from the great botanist of the north; *Murraea exotica* after one of his favorite pupils, a foreigner; *Browallia demisa* and *elata*, from a botanist of humble origin and character, who afterwards became a lofty bishop, and in whose work upon water I find the following quotation from Seneca in the hand-writing of Linnaeus: 'Many might attain wisdom if they did not suppose they had already attained it.' In like manner *Buffonia tenuifolia* is well known to be a satire on the slender botanical pretensions of the great French zoölogist, as the *Hillia parasitica* of Jacquin, though perhaps not meant, is an equally just one upon our pompous Sir John Hill. I mean not to approve of such satires. They stain the purity of our lovely science. If a botanist does not deserve commemoration, let him sink peaceably into oblivion. It savours of malignity to make his crown a crown of thorns, and if the application be unjust, it is truly diabolical."

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